ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

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The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2020-2022

John Guidinger	*Chair*
Steve Vagnozzi	*Vice-Chair*
Jeanie Merckel	*Treasurer*
Larry Krieg	*Secretary*
Steve Vagnozzi	*Gov't/Public Affairs Coordinator*
Warren Fritz	*Membership Coordinator*
Chuck Merckel	*Meetings Coordinator*
Robert Patterson	*Detroit/Metro Region Chair*
Clark Charnetski	*At-Large*
Carolyn Ulstad	*At-Large*

Webmaster, Larry Sobczak
ON TRACK Editor & Communications, Kay Chase

Recap of 2021 MEETINGS

28 January – Member Meeting
Virginia High Speed Rail

18 March – Member Meeting
Amtrak has Plans for Ohio
Zoom at 5:00 PM

15 April – Member Meeting
Toledo Passenger Rail Committee
Zoom at 5:00 PM

13 May – Join HSRail.org to hear
Derrick James Amtrak's Vision 2035

10 June – Member Meeting
Empire State Passengers
Zoom at 5:00 PM

15 July – Invitation to attend
VHSR Town Hall on-line

16 September – Member Meeting
Traverse City Rail Proposal
Zoom at 5:00 PM

9 October - 48th Annual Meeting

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

New Planning Documents Set Stage for Future Rail Development

Two crucial documents were completed this fall, setting the stage for the future development of passenger rail in Michigan and throughout the Midwest. Completing more than two years of work by MDOT and a large and diverse group of stakeholders, including MARP, the new State Long Range Transportation Plan, dubbed **Michigan Mobility 2045 (MM2045)**, was formally approved by the State Transportation Commission on November 4, 2021. Also completed, with the release of the final report on October 13, 2021, was the FRA-led **Midwest Regional Rail Study** that was initiated in 2016.

The development of **Michigan Mobility 2045 (MM2045)** successfully demonstrated an open and inclusive process in which thousands of Michiganders participated through telephone town halls, online surveys, workshops, listening sessions, and public comment periods. MARP was one of a number of Interest groups specifically invited to sit down in a virtual meeting room with MDOT personnel and the consultants to give input. MARP boosted its oral input with a document outlining our priorities. This is posted on the MARP website at **marp.org/?p=7113**. Many of our priorities are included in the 19 passenger rail improvement projects listed on ***(pages 145-46)*** of the **Final Plan**, as well as among MDOT's priority projects in **Table 23** on ***(page 110)*** of the **State Rail Plan Supplement**. A new Ann Arbor station, inexplicably, was not present in the Draft Plan, but has been added to the Final Plan.

Because the transportation sector is now the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, many participants and commenters were critical of the Draft plan for failing to recognize the critical role of Michigan's transportation network in addressing the climate crisis. In response, MDOT went back to the drawing board, adding a section on climate change to **Chapter 2, page 22**, as well as strengthening provisions throughout the document. Overall, the plan aspires to be less auto-centric, recognizing the importance of a multi-modal, interconnected network to the health of communities and the environment, yet ultimately falling short of making a significant shift in overall policy.

(***PLANNING*** *continues on page 3)*

MARP 2022 Meeting Schedule

Due to the ongoing pandemic, MARP will continue to meet online using Zoom. Watch your email for details of the January 20, 5:00pm meeting featuring Robert West, photographer and grandson of a Pullman porter. The Executive Committee meets via Zoom on the third Wednesday of the month. If you have ideas to contribute, questions or concerns please send them to us at **marprail@yahoo.com**. If you would like to participate, please contact MARP Chair John Guidinger at **jhguidinger1@yahoo.com**.

MARP Observes 48th Anniversary

A smaller than usual, COVID-suppressed crowd met on October 9 at the historic First Congregation Church in Jackson. In attendance this year were some who joined in those early years, as well as an individual who submitted his membership application just days before the Jackson meeting. Welcome Aboard, David K.!

Derrick James, Amtrak's government affairs director based in Chicago, was the featured speaker. As he has been doing at venues throughout the Midwest over the last several months, he talked about the opportunities and challenges of Amtrak's long-term vision, dubbed **Amtrak Connects US**. With "Amtrak Joe" at the helm and a Congress increasingly interested in expanding access to passenger trains, a once in a generation **opportunity for real expansion in the nation's passenger rail system** is close at hand.

In the business portion of the meeting, Chair John Guidinger lauded Chuck Merckel for assembling a group of volunteers to monitor the Amtrak stations in their communities and see that they are stocked with *The Michigan Passenger* newspapers, MARP brochures and train timetables. The proposed changes to the Bylaws were discussed, with some members expressing a desire to retain regional representation on the executive committee even if the specific designation of regional chairs is removed. Lacking the numbers required to make a change in the Bylaws, no vote was taken on the proposal. Chair Guidinger announced that publication of *The Michigan Passenger* newspaper has returned to four issues per year. The Treasurer's report as of 30 September shows income of $9,174 and expenses of $8,568 for the year. The checking account has a balance of $15,933. In addition, $2,104 remains in the Michigan Environmental Council grant fund and the Vanguard investment fund stands at $41,075.

Clark Charnetski presented information about the recent decision of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to discontinue development of the nearly complete environmental assessment of the proposed new Ann Arbor station. The FRA cited the high projected cost, excessive parking requirements, and station capacity exceeding passenger needs. Charnetski showed photos, maps and charts illustrating the inadequacy of the current facility and the impossibility of expansion on the existing site. He presented a resolution asking the FRA to "complete its assessment and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact for the City's preferred site," and thus allow "planning to continue so that the project would be ready to proceed with construction when funding becomes available." The resolution was approved unanimously.

In recent action, the executive committee has appointed

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Webinar Series:
A Tale of Two Rail Systems:
Exploring the Near-Term Crisis in Operations and the Long-Term Potential of Capital Expansion
WEDNESDAY NOV 17
2P EASTERN / 11P PACIFIC
RAIL PASSENGERS

RPA Webinar Examined Future Amtrak Opportunities and Current Challenges

With the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA)—also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill—people across the U.S. are wondering what this generational investment in passenger rail really means for American passengers.

Simultaneously, Amtrak is acknowledging something it's been grappling with for several months: last year's furloughs and buyouts, combined with a tight U.S. labor market, means there aren't enough workers to run the trains we have now.

Rail Passengers Association explored these opposing trends in a webinar presented on November 17th focused on the potential for near-term service disruptions, ways to minimize those disruptions, steps Amtrak is currently taking to regenerate its workforce, and the projected timeline for the full restoration of pre-pandemic service levels. RPA staff also talked about the rail and transit provisions in the final version of the IIJA, while looking ahead to the tangible benefits it will produce for America's rail passengers—in new equipment, new frequencies, and new corridors.

If you missed the November webinar, you may view this and all past webinars at railpassengers.org/webinars

(*continued from left*)

Larry Krieg as Secretary. In addition, Clark Charnetski of Ann Arbor and Carolyn Ulstad of Traverse City have been named to fill other vacancies. Chartnetski is a long-time member who has served various positions over the years. Ulstad comes to MARP after several years with the **Macatawa Area Coordinating Council** where she worked with **Westrain**, a coalition of public agencies interested in preserving and promoting the *Pere Marquette* train. Currently, Ulstad serves as the Transportation Program Manager for the **Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities,** which is currently ramping up the next phase of the **A2TC Project**.

BREAKING NEWS! Flynn Out, Gardner In

Amtrak announced on Dec. 15 that Bill Flynn will be retiring after leading the organization since April 2020. Stephen J. Gardner will be appointed as President and CEO effective Jan 17, 2022. Gardner currently serves as Amtrak's President, leading the railroad's day-to-day operations, customer growth initiatives and strategies to modernize Amtrak's products, services, infrastructure and fleet. Gardner has been with Amtrak since 2009 serving in a variety of leadership roles. He has been responsible for efforts to expand state-supported service partnerships, increase *Acela* capacity, improve Northeast Corridor infrastructure and develop Amtrak's strategic plan. "I'm truly humbled and honored to assume this role for America's Railroad," Gardner said. "With the help of the bipartisan infrastructure investment, I'm excited about working with our state, commuter and freight rail and federal partners to improve our assets, renew our fleet and expand Amtrak service to more communities. Having started my railroad career as an Amtrak intern, it's an opportunity of a lifetime to help lead the incredible team of dedicated men and women at Amtrak." **Read the news release here.**

Amtrak Averts Temporary Service Cuts

In a **December 14 memo to employees**, Amtrak CEO Bill Flynn reversed course and said he no longer anticipated a reduction in services in January as had been anticipated due to lagging vaccination rates among personnel. Bolstered by recent court action staying enforcement of an executive order mandating vaccination for employees of federal contractors, Amtrak will revert to its own policy of allowing testing as an alternative to vaccination or, in certain cases, granting exemptions. Thus far nearly 95.7% of Amtrak's workers have complied with the vaccination rule or received an accommodation while 97.3% have received at least one shot, leaving fewer than 500 workers in noncompliance.

In an appearance before a House T&I subcommittee in December, President Stephen Gardner highlighted a "silver lining" of the COVID year: despite low ridership during the pandemic, Amtrak has attracted many new passengers, 30% of them in recent months making their first trip on Amtrak. At about 500,000 riders

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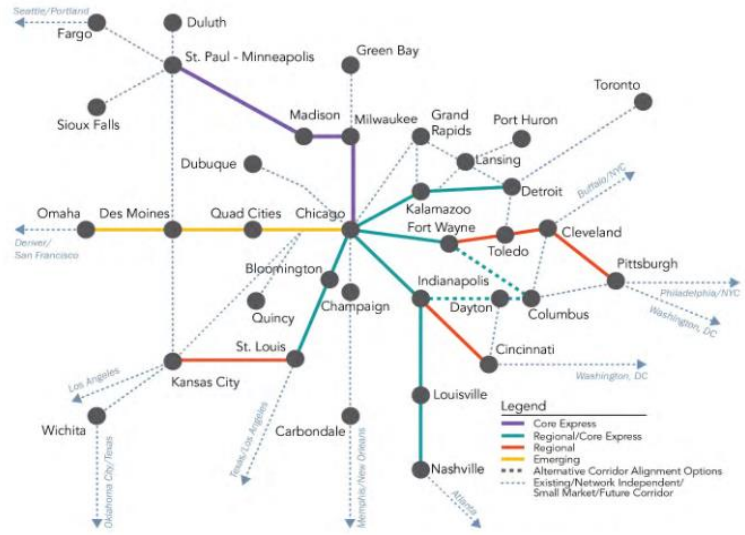
(***PLANNING** continued from page 1*)

The final report of **The Midwest Regional Rail Plan** was made public at Chicago Union Station on October 13 by FRA Deputy Administrator Amit Bose who described it as "a 40-year multi-state framework and vision for restoring, modernizing, and expanding the existing intercity passenger rail network in the Midwest." It is important to recognize that this plan is meant to guide, not dictate, the development of an integrated network of fast, frequent, reliable trains linking Midwest communities large and small and creating synergistic relationships in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Importantly, it will require a coordinated effort by the states and a massive commitment of funding from state, federal and private sources to bring it to fruition.

To learn more about the plan, listen on Friday, January 14 when the High Speed Rail Alliance hosts FRA Project Manager Peter Schwartz who guided the study from start to finish. There will be ample time for your questions.

REGISTER NOW for this FREE online event

What the Midwest Regional Rail Network Might Look Like in the Future



Some of the Trade-Offs To Be Considered

More Core Express

- Higher Capital Cost
- Higher Fares – Operating surplus, less ridership
- Lower fares – Break-even operation, higher ridership

More Regional

- Lower Capital Cost
- Higher fares – Break-even operations, less ridership
- Lower fares – Operating support needed, higher ridership

(*continued from left*)

per month, this is double the pre-COVID average.

Read more of Gardner's testimony here to learn of Amtrak's plans for expansion given the historic infusion of funding in the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure bill. Watch the video of the December 9 T&I subcommittee hearing ***"Leveraging IIJA: Plans for Expanding Intercity Passenger Rail"*.**

View from elsewhere . . .

"We look forward to the expansion and working with Amtrak to develop passenger service. This is historic. We're excited about what this does for our customers, and what this does for our communities."

"We are absolutely committed to working with the freight and passenger community. I stand here to welcome Canadian Pacific to Louisiana and look forward to having a long, successful relationship with them. Now is the time to think big for transportation in our state."

--**James Clements**, SVP of Strategic Planning and Technology Transformation for Canadian Pacific Railway, and **Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards**, respectively, in announcing CP's commitment to host an initial daily round trip between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. A future second round trip would depend on funding for further capital improvements. This announcement came on the heels of the 08 Dec. shareholder approval of CP's merger with Kansas City Southern, which will give CP control of the track. **Read more about the plans here**.

New VIA Train Set Seen at Battle Creek

With a locomotive and a cab-car bringing up the rear, the first of VIA's new Siemens-built, 4-coach, bi-directional train sets was caught at Battle Creek on 28 September on its way to delivery next day in Montreal. The first in an order of 32 new trains, this consist will soon be joined by a second set and both will begin testing between Ottawa and Coteau through the winter. The new trains will operate on the Quebec City to Windsor corridor.

Photo courtesy of Robert Borg.

Passenger 1 – full price
Passenger 2 – 15% off full price
Passenger 3 – 60% off full price
Passengers 4,5,6 – 70% off full price

Amtrak.com/ShareFares

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